



TORTOISE CLUB - LOST TORTOISE INFORMATION SHEET

PREVENTION HELP.

Microchip your tortoise – If your pet is healthy you should consider micro-chipping your pet in the summer months. The best place to place a chip is in the back left limb. Micro-chipping should be done by an experienced vet ideally with a mini microchip, as this means less trauma to the leg and is still accepted by Defra on registers. If your tortoise has been micro-chipped, keep a note of the chip serial number, the type of chip used, this will be very important should your tortoise go missing.

Photo ID your pet – you should photo both the carapace and particularly the plastron (tummy) as this is like a tortoise thumb print. Also photograph any striking individual features in detail e.g. missing limbs, double scutes, chips in the shell etc. Along with the photographs record weight and measurements (carapace length). Clear pictures for identification are important in the event that your tortoise is lost both for using to advertise the lost tortoise and to prove ownership once found.



Consider creating a "lost kit" in case your pet should ever disappear – this should include the photographs and a written description of your tortoise including paperwork and microchip number if applicable and will mean these items are at hand if you need them in an emergency. Also keep within this an action checklist of what to do, along with the current phone numbers of emergency contacts, (see 'what to do if you lose your tortoise for more info'); consider keeping a copy of these details online in a stored email in case you lose the paper copy.



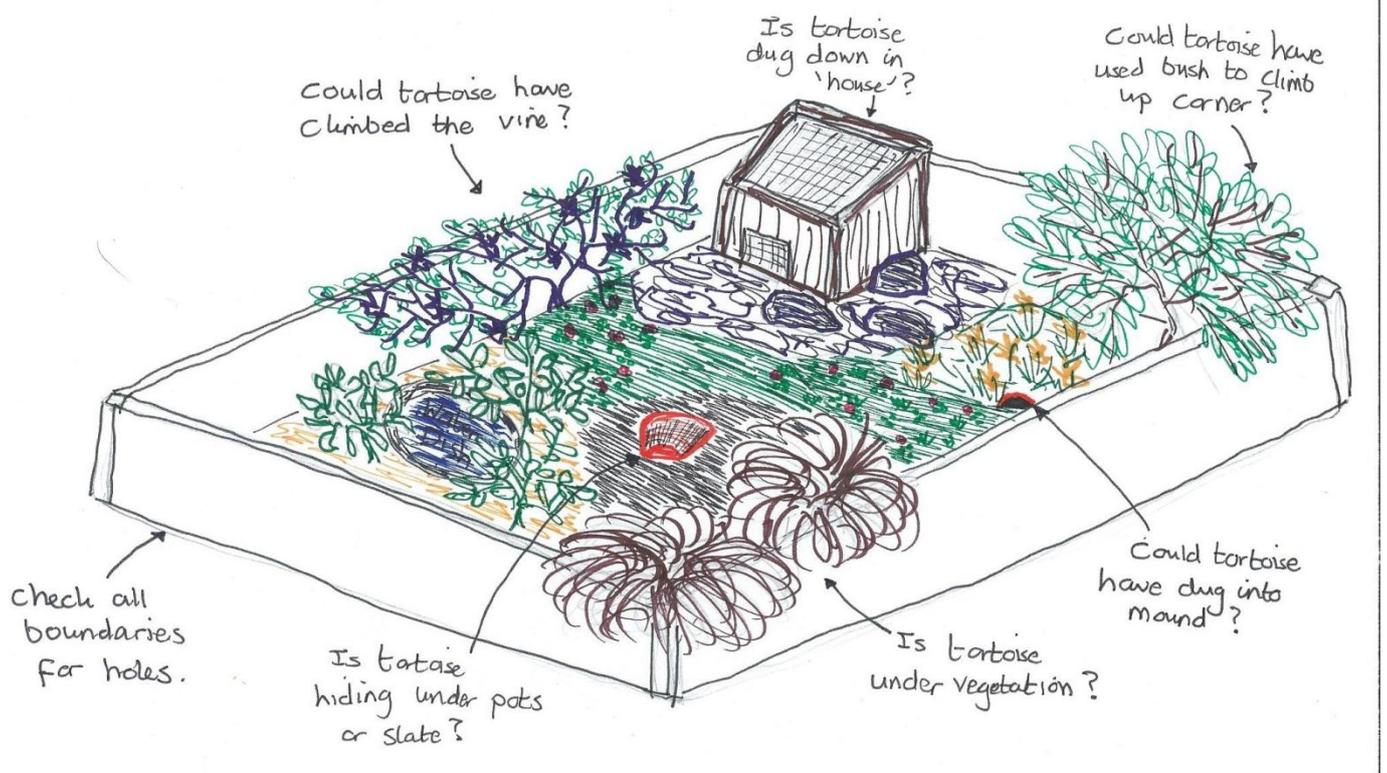
Consider fitting a simple CCTV system, or alarm to your shed or greenhouse if the tortoise is kept in them, and a camera overlooking outdoor runs. Some CCTV systems can be checked using your mobile phone anytime you wish, providing further piece of mind when you are out and about. Further ways to provide protection against theft include not advertising to people you keep tortoise/s, insure that people passing by your property cannot see your pet, and shrubbery or privacy fencing will offer additional security. Spiky shrubs attached to fence panel will deter people from climbing in and padlock gates when you are out.

Predators – The kindest and soppiest of pets can pose a threat to a pet tortoise, and so should not be left alone in the same area for long periods of time. All too often tortoises suffer terrible and sometimes fatal injuries as a result of dog attacks. Even if not a chewing hazard a friendly dog can pick a tortoise up and place it outside its pen only for it to escape! Foxes can also take tortoises and leave them injured and outside of their run. Cats can be a risk to very young/small tortoises and mice and rats can chew legs/eyes off tortoises especially if allowed to hibernate outside.

Tortoise runs should be made rodent secure if tortoise are allowed to stay out overnight/over winter. Sheds and greenhouses should most certainly be made rodent secure.

Secure and happy tortoise run – Tortoises will climb and dig - Check all boundaries on a daily basis for damage or collapse. Boundaries of enclosures should be high enough to **prevent the tortoise climbing over**, and as smooth as possible to eliminate any foot holds. Avoid corners if possible, as tortoises are surprisingly good climbers, and can 'chimney' up corners – if you do have them consider placing a 'lid' over this area to prevent escape. Climbing plants can also prove to be a handy 'ladder' for tortoises, so try to avoid climbers over boundary fences or walls!

Fences/walls should also be dug 2 inches below the surface, as this is likely to deter most species of tortoise from burrowing out.



Russian tortoises are particularly adept at escape attempts, and special care should be taken with their enclosures to ensure that they cannot scale the walls, or tunnel underneath. You may need to dig out the enclosure, and lay thick gauge plastic netting, then replace the soil to prevent excavations. **Do NOT use chicken wire/fine mesh** as it poses a danger to trapping legs/heads especially in young tortoises. Alternatively, ensure the perimeter fence is buried 8 – 12" below ground as well as high enough above ground to prevent climbing escapes.

Your tortoise should feel secure and happy so as to reduce escape attempts. Make sure all boundaries are solid and can't be seen through – wire and plastic/glass are no good as the tortoise will constantly try to get through. Ensure there is cover such as shrubs, ornamental grasses and potentially a hut of sorts. Reduce stress from other pets by keeping them separate, supervise children around the tortoise and do not mix species or males and females (unless for mating purposes). Ensure there are places to escape from the rain, wind or cold and an indoor heated enclosure. For more on designing an enclosure go to www.tortoiseclub.org

Pond security - Tortoises, unlike turtles, are unable to swim. If you have a garden pond, this should be fenced off or covered over to prevent the tortoise falling in.

Summary:

- Create a lost kit of info inc. emergency contacts:

- Micro-chip tortoise and write down number

- Photo ID tortoise
- Written description of tortoise
- Keep tortoise secure and happy
- Keep pond secure
- Beware of potential predators

HOW TO FIND A TORTOISE - TIPS

Searches – As soon as an absence is discovered search immediate areas extensively. **Follow the edges of paths or hedges** as tortoises tend to follow edges instead of tackling open spaces. Get down on your hands and knees and **comb the undergrowth to check your tortoise has not dug down** - look for loose soil and other clues of disturbance. Burrowing can happen, especially when the weather has been very cool or very warm. Look around and under rocks and vegetation; anywhere the tortoise may have burrowed down out of sight. Look where there **are splashes of sunshine** as tortoises are likely to pause in such spots. If you know the directions your tortoise tends to head in then follow these first! **Look for low lying plants that have nibble marks** on as a tortoise's v-shaped bite is obvious compared to rabbits or such.

Once initial searches within the first day have passed then **check again the next day in the early morning** as this is when the tortoise will be sunbathing to raise their temps for the day. Look for sunny spots in your area. Ask friends and family to help search a wider area than the immediate enclosure or garden. You have the best chance of finding your tortoise **within the first 48 hours**.

Check the pond very carefully – If there is a pond in your area always check this option sooner rather than later as tortoises can sometimes be saved from falling in water. A tortoise can have access to a pond for years, but only needs to get too close once to fall in and drown. Note all is not lost if found quickly, as a tortoise can often be saved from a pond fall with swift action. Immediate treatment can be to tip the tortoise nose down to help the water run out, and also pump the front limbs for several minutes to help expel air and circulate oxygen. The tortoise will need immediate vet attention and very likely a course of intensive heat care treatment (heat lamps) with carefully monitored antibiotic cover to prevent pneumonia or other related illnesses from taking hold. Always use probiotics and heat lamps with antibiotics.

If lost in house: Tortoises lost in a house will normally seek out a **dark corner with areas of cover e.g. underneath something**. So carefully inspect under furniture and appliances, and any place where the tortoise could have squeezed through. Unfortunately, the missing tortoise may not come out for food or water. Again, a thorough inch-by-inch search on your hands and knees is the best way to find them.

Inform everyone you can think of in the area (if possible this 'area' should include a 20km (xx mile) radius according to the Tortoise Trust) who may be able to help including related professions:

- The police,
- animal sanctuary's/rescue centres,
- Woodgreen Animal Shelter – call 0844 248 8181
- local tortoise clubs, pet shops, garden centres, zoos, vets,
- RSPCA centres local to you and the RSPCA Reptile rescue based in Brighton – call 07815525578
- Postman – they are up early and speak to many people,
- Advertise loss in free local papers,
- Use your social media contacts to spread the word,
- Neighbours and family
- Put **fliers** through letterboxes of local houses, put photos of missing signs in shops and online e.g. on Facebook and stress that the tortoise is a much loved pet. **Post information anywhere where someone**

might bring a lost tortoise, or ask for care information. You could offer a reward if you feel comfortable with this - these have proven effective even for dishonest reasons e.g. the thief returning the tortoise for a reward. Include a physical description and photo on any signs if possible. Consider contacting the **local press** and asking them to run a story – make sure however that they **do not publish your address details**.

- Contact BCG rehoming group via **John Hayward** from the National Theft Register for Zoological Wildlife Investigations who runs a national register of all cases he is informed of. His contact details are: Tel/fax: 01869 325699 Mobile: 07802 404929 Pager: 07626 120425 e-mail: jh@ntr.supanet.com
- **Contact the Tortoise Club** via adele1986@hotmail.co.uk to have your lost pet registered with us - we will post the basic information about your tortoise and a picture if provided into our Facebook page and that of related groups pages e.g. other local tortoise clubs.
- **Register your missing pet with the UK Missing Pets Register** on <http://www.nationalpetregister.org/what-we-do.php> you can pre-register your pets on here so that they can be quickly added to the lost section of the pet register if the situation arises. This is the only time your pets details will be made public. The website also contains links to pet shop, rescue centers etc., which may help you find ones local to you to contact. They also have a Facebook and Twitter account where you could post your pets details:

https://www.facebook.com/nationalpetregister?v=app_6261817190&filter=3

<https://twitter.com/petregister>

- **Contact the tortoise protection group:** The Tortoise Protection Group is only too pleased to help try and unite lost/found tortoises with owners. They can be contacted by emailing a photo and information of your tortoise on contactus@tortoise-protection-group.org.uk. Photos of lost tortoises will be published through our website, forums, Facebook groups etc.
- **Contact Pets Located:** To register your missing, lost or stolen pet (whether it be a cat, dog, parrot, snake etc) costs only £10.00+VAT for a full year - with an option to renew for a further period at the end of the 12 months. <http://www.petslocated.com/>
- **If the tortoise is micro-chipped,** contact the company the details are registered with and report him/her missing. This is often Petlog <https://www.petlog.org.uk/ive-lost-a-pet/>

Remember, if you are ever offered a tortoise for sale which does not have the required paperwork, the reason may be that it has been stolen. Never buy a tortoise in these circumstances, and report the matter to the local Wildlife Crime Officer – it is an offence to offer an Annex A tortoise for sale without the relevant Article 10 documentation.

SUMMARY

- Search run/garden/house on hands and knees - time is critical, you will have to cancel your plans and get all potential friends to help
- Think like a tortoise when searching
- Check pond
- Inform everyone as stated in the main text and use all media sources available to you to spread the word (local and national)